

LESSON PLAN 62: FAB PHONE PHOTOGRAPHY

Objective: Taking better snaps with your cellphone camera.

Age range: 5-18

Cellphone cameras are getting better but they're still not perfect and can at times be frustrating. How often do you have the perfect photo only for the quality and available functionality of the camera to let you down? Of course, it's not always the camera's fault. There are some techniques you can use to get the best out of a cellphone camera ... and give you the best chance of successful snapping.

YOU WILL NEED

Cellphone with camera.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Photography, composition and design, problem solving, presentation, planning.

METHOD

1. It's not a digital SLR ... so don't expect it to be!

Remember cellphone cameras are limited. Recognise and accept that you're never going to get incredible shots with awesome depth of field and vibrant colours in low light.

2. Get to know your camera

Read the manual and take loads of photos until you figure out what your cellphone can and cannot do. Find out what it does well, and then use these strengths. For example, forget close-ups, as focal points are rarely less than 12 inches, but these little devices often give good contrast.

3. Let the screen image 'catch up'

The way a shot is exposed sometimes takes a second or two to settle down, so let the image catch up before you click the shutter.

4. Hold horizontally

The 'norm' seems to be to hold a cellphone upright when taking photos (as you would when you're making a call). Unfortunately, in this position, it's very unstable, with little support and this will contribute to camera wobble. You'll find it's much more stable if you hold it horizontally.



5. Be creative!

These cameras generally cope poorly with strong, direct light, and bright, grey skies (often causing the rest of the shot to be underexposed). You can counteract this by cutting the sky out of the frame entirely; fill it with something else of interest.



Patterns are good. Strong lines are good. Also, work the angles. Get down low and shoot upwards. Or hold the phone in odd positions to get shots from 'alternative' perspectives.

6. Simplify the image

Photos taken on cellphone cameras can look very flat and/or cluttered because of their deep focal range – everything is in focus. See if you can find something to put in the foreground of the image or isolate the subject by choosing a plain background.

7. Know when the photo is taken

You'll probably pick this up as part of 'getting to know your camera' but with the majority of these things the image isn't captured at exactly the moment when you press your finger on the button – the shutter release is a short time afterwards.

8. Cheat

And finally, if you can't take the perfect shot ... manufacture it! There are plenty of great photo editing tools available. Okay, so even the best software in the world won't fix bad shots but as long as there's something to work with, you can turn average images into ones of which you can be proud. And who's to know!

Cellphone cameras are far from perfect. But when they're all you have – how many of us carry around a digital SLR in our pocket? – knowing how to get the best out of them will produce far more impressive results.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

- Discuss why cellphone cameras are different from 'dedicated' cameras.
- Compare different types of cellphone camera. How do they perform?
- Have a class/school photography competition, with only photos taken by a cellphone camera allowed.
- Alphabet Photos – assign student some letters of the alphabet and send them on a scavenger hunt to search for an item that begins with that letter.



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